

A review of the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and psychopathic traits: is the EI construct a mediator between aggression and psychopathy?

Background: In spite of their normal intelligence, individuals with psychopathic traits are usually characterized as having numerous troubles with social and emotional facets in their daily. These deficits that make complicated their adaptation could be related with deficiencies in their Emotional Intelligence (EI) or their ability to perceive, use, understand and regulate emotions.

Aims: The aim of the present study is to review the existing evidence of the relationships between EI and the population with psychopathy traits for a better understanding of the emotional problems of these individuals. As well as to looking for evidence of EI as a possible mediator between psychopathy and the aggressive behavior.

Methods: Scopus and Medline were searched for finding relevant articles in Spanish and English. Articles with psychopathic trait populations of all ages assessed through different scales were accepted when they were measured together with a self-report or an ability EI test.

Results: These studies provide some evidences that participants with psychopathic traits have lower EI than control participants in almost all the articles found. Specifically, it seems that the secondary psychopathy and their impulsivity trait are the most related aspect of these construct with EI. Besides, the gender and age variables seems to play some roles in the link between EI and psychopathy. For its parts, some studies show evidence of the positive relationship between psychopathy and aggressive behavior as in a negative relation between EI and antisocial conduct. However, none of the reviewed articles stablish EI as a mediator variable.

Conclusions: The results obtained from the review could be of special importance for future treatment of psychopathic population as well as for the prevention of a possible disruptive behavior in their adolescence or adulthood. Given that a deficit in EI is achieved for psychopath, an EI intervention could act as a protective factor by reducing their emotional and social shortages or prevent them if the training is implemented in an early period of their life and, therefore, improving their inappropriate behavior. Nonetheless, future research is necessary for a better understanding of the role of EI as a mediator between psychopathy and aggression.